

A Fright Of Nightmare by **HanShaped**

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Summary: Even though everything was okay and everyone was safe, he couldn't shake off the feeling that something was off. / A short one-shot exploring possible consequences of facing the monstrosities of the Upside Down. But as terrifying as they might be, nothing is that scary with a friend by your side.

A Fright Of Nightmare

A/N: It's a repost of a fanfic published on Ao3 on October 30th, 2017.

So, yeah, another one-shot, because I couldn't help myself.

This time, though, with Will guest starring (and maybe little hints of Byeler, if you squint really hard; I mean, I ship them a bit too, so...).

More angsty than A Taste Of Freedom (let's say it's a kind of continuation, though it works as a stand-alone too), but with a very fluffy ending (I promise!).

Enjoy!

A Fright Of Nightmare

Mike was so relieved, when the summer break had finally come around. Never had he been so excited about not having to go to school before, but the year of 1985 was different from the very beginning. Having El back in his life meant that he could finally fully enjoy many activities, which last year seemed to be only a miserable substitute of real happiness. And on top of that, he could devote all of his time and attention to the very girl that had helped him become himself again.

The beginning of summer marked a few changes for El—changes both she and Mike were very happy about. She still couldn't go out too often and use her powers outside the cabin, but Hopper agreed on her spending more time at the Byers' than before. El was even allowed to go with Joyce to the town once in awhile, so she could get more used to being in public. Although it wasn't clear if she would start school this September (Hopper insisted on having her home-schooled for another year), she was learning pretty fast with the help of Chief, Will's mom and the party, and Mike was pretty sure she could make it without bigger problems. And he had to admit that he couldn't wait to have an opportunity to spend more time with her.

For now, though, long summer days seemed to be enough for him, especially since the weather was nicer than he had initially anticipated. Mike and El were spending their time running around the woods, playing games, watching films, talking, and laughing, with all the other members of the party or just by themselves. And Mike was quick to conclude that these were the best summer holidays he had ever had.

Although the first of July started off like any other day, it promptly became very special, marking the first ever sleepover for El. Astonishment hadn't left Mike yet, as he still couldn't believe that Chief agreed to that idea (though he suspected it had something to do with Mrs Byers, and how insistent she was). And so they ended up at Will's, just the three of them—the rest of the party was to join them the next day.

They spent a really nice evening, listening to Will's new mixtape, joking, and discussing plans for the rest of the holidays. Mike was very happy, seeing how close El and Will had become over the last few months. He guessed that shared experiences of the Upside Down were what had brought them together, so he didn't feel like bringing it up, but he was pleased that his closest friends got along so well.

Mrs Byers peeked into Will's bedroom from time to time to check on them. Mike noticed that she seemed pretty happy herself, with a look of relief and tenderness every time she looked at any of them. He caught himself thinking that quite often she was more affectionate towards him than his own mother.

After a few hours of delightfully spent time, Will's mom finally forced them to go to sleep, saying that Hopper would kill her and certainly ban any more sleepovers if El came home more tired than she had left it. The kids reluctantly agreed, and soon Mike found himself laying on the floor, tucked in a sleeping bag, with Will by his side, and El enjoying the bed, since she was a very special guest (and a girl).

Although he had no trouble sleeping in the sleeping bag, he stayed awake, even after his friends' breaths had evened, and there were no other sounds to disturb the silence filling the dark room. He was happy and everything was alright, but falling asleep still terrified

him. Lately, he wanted to do anything else but sleep, which didn't seem too reasonable. Even though he was well-aware of that, he simply couldn't afford seeing one of *these* one more time.

He gritted his teeth, scolding himself for being such a crybaby. They were nothing but dreams, and he had faced worse things in the past—scarier monsters and real life-threatening situations.

But it was all about the past, wasn't it?

He wandered those claustrophobic cold corridors, panic slowly taking over his mind. Lights were flickering, as if the power was constantly going on and off. It made him think of the Upside Down, and such a thought was only causing more dread to fill his heart.

The weight of Will's numb body in his arms felt crushing, but he kept stumbling forward. He couldn't give up on him, he just couldn't. Despite his arms being stiff, he brought Will closer, feeling his cold skin even through the material of his shirt.

He had to get him out of here. Unfortunately, he was unaided, unable to find Mrs Byers, Hopper, Dr Owens, or even Bob. All on his own, he prayed not to bump into any of those horrific dogs, roaming the lab.

And then, as if on cue, he heard a noise behind them. Rustling, that was getting closer and closer with every passing second.

Oh no .

He felt the adrenaline kicking in, somehow finding strength to start running. Everything around him was getting blurry, but he didn't dare to stop.

And then he spotted it.

The door.

The only way to escape from that hellish place.

However, before he could reach them, he tripped on one of the bodies covering the floor. He tried to turn a bit mid-air to prevent

Will from hitting the ground, but to almost no avail.

Not even a second passed, and the monster was already standing above them, its muzzle open wide, revealing hundreds of sharp teeth.

His scream was ringing in Mike's ears, as he closed his eyes, hugging Will's body tightly, waiting for those eerie teeth to sink into his skin.

Mike's breath was shallow as he woke up, feeling droplets of sweat running down his neck. He covered his mouth with shaky hands in an effort to muffle his uneven breathing, not to wake up Will or El.

Another nightmare, as if he had expected that it would be different this time. They hadn't always followed the same scenario—sometimes they were about Will, other times about El. The locations differed as well, from school, through the woods, to the lab. But the ending always remained the same—he was unable to save his friends.

He sat up abruptly, nervously running fingers through his hair. He couldn't go back to sleep, to that nightmarish lab, to that utterly overwhelming feeling of helplessness. He needed some space, to gather his bearings. And he didn't have the heart to wake his friends.

Mike slowly crawled out of the sleeping bag, careful not to make too much noise. He hopped over still sleeping Will and walked out of the room, in the direction of the kitchen. The house was eerily quiet, with nothing but darkness visible through the windows.

He kept going, his bare foot patting on the floor. It took him a few seconds to reach the living room, where he silently collapsed on the couch, gazing at the ceiling. He had to do something about those nightmares, otherwise he would go insane. The worst part was he didn't know what.

All those memories were just constantly coming back to him. Even though everything was okay and everyone was safe, he couldn't shake off the feeling that something was off. In addition, he was afraid that the next time something bad happened, not all of them might make it out alive.

He closed his eyes, so much immersed in his own thoughts, that he initially didn't hear quiet footsteps, approaching the living room. It was a small silhouette, stopping short at the entry to the living room, that finally caught his attention when he cracked his eye, sensing someone's gaze on him.

He winced slightly at the sight of El. It wasn't that he wanted to be all alone now (actually, on the contrary), but she needed her sleep too. And he would calm down eventually, he always did. "Sorry for waking you up," he muttered sheepishly, lowering his head.

The couch beside him dipped ever so slightly, and soon a petite cool hand squeezed his own. "You didn't." Her voice was quiet, with a bit of grogginess still present, but her grip remained firm. "I felt it," she explained calmly, and soon, probably upon seeing a quizzical look on his face, continued: "That you were scared. Why?," she inquired curiously.

He could see out of the corner of his eye as she tilted her head, a few strands of her now longer hair falling into her forehead. Sometimes she resembled a small curious kitten, intrigued by the world around her, drinking it in relentlessly with that mesmerizing big brown eyes of hers. He couldn't stop a little smile from spreading on his lips at that thought.

"I had a nightmare," he mumbled after a while and squeezed his eyes shut, doing his best to keep those gruesome images from flooding his mind.

"A nightmare?," she echoed questioningly, not letting go of his hand.

"A bad dream," he clarified patiently, his eyes nailed on the window, through which all he could see was that impenetrable darkness.

El nodded slightly, furrowing her brows. "You are very upset," she stated bluntly. "What it was about?"

Mike sighed deeply. He should've expected that she'd ask him that question, and he didn't blame her. She probably experienced a good portion of her own night terrors, so it wasn't any novelty to her and there was no one else who could understand it as well as she did.

Despite that, the nightmare was still so fresh in his mind, that he didn't want to go back to it yet.

However, her inquisitive look and genuine concern he could see on her face eventually made him change his mind. He took a deep breath, wondering how to tell her about it. Bloody bodies flashed before his eyes, and he shook his head, trying to clear his thoughts. "You saw the lab," he started softly, gazing at her thoughtfully. He slowly breathed in before continuing. "I was there," he revealed, swallowing a lump that had formed in his throat. "When it happened. I... I watched as those dogs—demo-dogs..." He sucked in a breath, not knowing which words to use to describe that horrible scene, which played out before his eyes for a thousand time.

His hands were trembling, and he felt his eyes stinging, unable to stop tears from falling down. The grip on his hand tightened reassuringly, when El moved a little closer to him. Soft fingertips touched his cheeks, gathering the tears, but she stayed silent, giving him a chance to continue. He cleared his throat, and squeezed back her hand. "And Will looked so pale and weak, and it hurt him so, so much..." His voice was breaking, barely audible. If she wasn't sitting so close, she most likely wouldn't be able to hear any of his words. "I thought...", he stopped short, his mouth as dry as if it was filled with sand. "I thought I'd lose him, too," he breathed faintly, as shivers ran through his whole body.

He didn't even register collapsing into her arms, but burrowing his face in the crook of her neck felt so comforting. He let the tears fall from his eyes and soak into an oversized T-shirt she was wearing, she didn't seem to mind though. Her fingers were running through his tousled hair, massaging his scalp gently, and Mike decided that it had to be the most pleasant sensation he had ever felt.

"And you lost him. In that bad dream," she guessed softly, her breath tickling the skin on his forehead.

He just nodded, not willing to even lift his head. He felt terrible, both about the nightmare, and about El having to hear all of this and see him in such a pathetic state.

"But it was just a dream," she reasoned reassuringly. "You *didn't* lose

us." She planted a delicate kiss on his forehead.

He shut his eyes, compressing his lips. "But I could have," he whispered after a few moments. "And I couldn't even do anything."

"You did many things," she assured firmly, stroking his cheek. "We would be gone without you." Her tone was serious, and he couldn't help but look up at her, at strong conviction filling her eyes. "And I promised you." She smiled lightly, and Mike's heart fluttered at this sight. "You won't lose me again. You won't lose any of us."

Seeing a tender look on her face and feeling comforting warmth of her body, he couldn't help but believe her. "Promise?" His voice was still small, but no longer as tearful as moments before.

Her smile grew and those cute little wrinkles appeared in the corners of her eyes. "Promise," she declared affectionately, bringing him closer to her, and burrowing her face in his messy hair.